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ABSTRACT

In this grade 5 social studies and language arts interdisciplinary unit, students are required to investigate key battles in the Revolutionary War for independence. Working in groups, students research eight battles to try to determine which was the most important battle leading up to victory for the U.S. colonists. The battles to be investigated are Bennington, Bunker Hill, Cowpens, Lexington and Concord, Oriskany, Saratoga, Trenton, and Yorktown. The student guide provides detailed instructions and contains a list of resources, including Web sites. The teacher's guide ties the lesson to California state standards and provides suggestions on how to conduct and evaluate the activities. (RJC)

History Social Science



**Schools of California
Online Resources for
Education (SCORE):
Connecting California's
Classrooms to the
World**

The Battle of the Battlefields

5th Grade Activity by Mitch Mendosa

SCORE

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<http://score.rims.k12.ca.us/activity/battle/>

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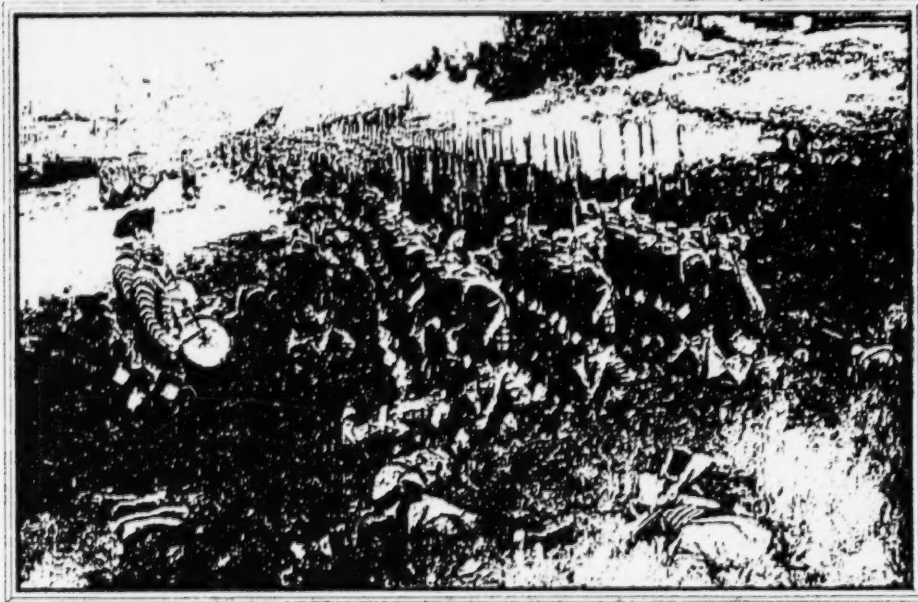
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The Battle of the Battlefields

Introduction

Many important battles were fought during America's War for Independence. Commemorating these battles helps to remind us of the tremendous risks and sacrifices that American colonists endured as they struggled for their freedom from British control. We know that the colonists eventually won the war, but the road to victory was by no means an easy one. Until the war finally ended, nobody knew for sure that Britain's powerful military forces could ever be defeated. American soldiers outnumbered the British in most battles, but they were inexperienced in the ways of war and poorly supplied with weapons and other equipment. British forces, on the other hand, were well trained and amply supplied by the English government with good-quality weapons, uniforms, and other equipment. The patriots did finally defeat the British, but along the way several battles ended in defeat and many soldiers lost their lives.

Today, these historic battles continue to shape our remembrances of America's struggle to gain independence. For this reason, the President of the United States has decided that the American people (and also visitors from other countries) should have the opportunity to learn more about the major battles of the War for Independence. He has authorized an award of \$1,000,000 for the construction of a new museum at the site of the most important battle fought during the war. The main difficulty, the President has discovered, is determining which battle site should get the money. To make the right decision, the President needs your help!

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The Task

Your class has been selected by the President to serve as the Battlefield Research Analysis Group (BRAG). He asks that you investigate this matter and recommend one battle as being most important to American victory during the Revolutionary War. As mentioned above, the President will award \$1,000,000 for the establishment of a museum at the battle site you choose. The museum is intended to educate people about the major battles of the Revolutionary War -- particularly the battle that your class selects as being most important to the final American victory.

BRAG members will be divided into groups. Each group shall first research one of the battles listed below to determine how it affected the course of the war and contributed to the final American victory. After researching individual battles within the groups, all BRAG members will then meet together to decide which site should receive the \$1,000,000 award.

The battle sites to be investigated are:

- Bennington
- Bunker Hill
- Cowpens
- Lexington and Concord
- Oriskany
- Saratoga
- Trenton
- Yorktown



Resources

Your social studies textbook is the best place to start looking for information about battles fought during the War for Independence. **Other useful books** can be found in the library as well.

The internet is another excellent source of information on various aspects of the Revolutionary War. Many of the links shown on SCORE's "War for Independence" page will be helpful. Some additional online resources are listed below. There are still others that aren't shown here, but in order to use them you will need to find out how they can be accessed (this might take some investigation, but it will be worth the effort!).

General Web Sources

The web site Cycles of U.S. History -- Revolutionary Cycle (1701-1791) (<http://www.seanet.com/Users/pamur/revo.html>) provides a good overview of the War for Independence. It includes linking pages that will help you investigate several of the battles we are considering. Map collections, time lines, profiles of important individuals who participated in the war effort -- these are just some of the resources included on this site that you will find useful. It is an excellent place to begin your online research.

Web Sites for Specific Battles:

Bunker Hill

The Battle of Bunker Hill

<http://www.ilt.columbia.edu/k12/history/bunker.html>

Cowpens

The Battle of Cowpens

<http://www.ilt.columbia.edu/k12/history/cowpens.html>

Lexington and Concord

The Battle of Lexington

<http://odur.let.rug.nl/~usa/E/lexington/lexingxx.htm>

The Battle of Concord

<http://odur.let.rug.nl/~usa/E/concord/concorxx.htm>

Oriskany

The Battle of Oriskany

<http://one-web.org/oneida/facts/oriskany.html>

Saratoga

The Battles of Saratoga

<http://www.spa.net/battle/battle.htm>

Trenton

Trenton by Kevin

<http://www.pen.k12.va.us/Anthology/Div/Albemarle/Schools/MurrayElem/ClassPages/Prudl>

Yorktown

Yorktown

<http://www.williamsburg.com/wol/tour/york/york.html>

Miscellaneous Resources:

E-mail Other Schools:

One valuable source of information could be a school located in an area near the battlefield you are researching. Here are some locations that will help you locate e-mail addresses:

Web66

<http://Web66.coled.umn.edu/schools.html>

Hotlist of K-12 Internet School Sites

<http://www.sendit.nodak.edu/k12/>

Newsgroups:

Posting questions on newsgroups is a good way to get expert answers. One newsgroup where you can take your questions can be found at *soc.history.war.us-revolution*

Mailing Lists:

Posting a message on a mailing list is also a good way to get information. **Kidsphere** is a popular mailing list where teachers ask and answer questions and discuss various topics. To subscribe, send an email request to request@vms.cis.pitt.edu

Process

BRAG's leader (the teacher or appointed person) will first organize the class into groups, and then assign one battle to each group. Before going through the steps described below, each group should review the following questions. These questions are intended to be used as guidelines for your research. Feel free to add to this list any other questions that you think will help guide your research.

- Was the battle fought at the beginning, middle, or end of the war?
- What important events led up to this battle?
- Did the Americans win the battle?
- How many Americans and British were killed during this battle?
- How did this battle contribute to the final American victory? (Note: even if the Americans lost the battle you are investigating, did they gain experience that helped them defeat the British in future battles?)

Step 1:

Keeping in mind the questions listed above, each group begins by researching the battlefield assigned to it. If computer availability is limited, paper-based resources (text, encyclopedias, and other books) can be used by the groups waiting to go online. Groups using the computers should note for later use those URLs that seem useful. Students using books should write down useful page numbers for later reference.

When the research phase is completed, all groups can meet together to report their findings. Each group should provide details on how the battle they researched played an important role in the American victory. Use stories, pictures, graphs, and other supporting material to help explain the significance of your battle site to other BRAG groups.

Step 2:

When all groups have reported on their battle sites, the BRAG should then reduce the number of battlefields being considered to three. The URLs and book page numbers for each of the three sites chosen as finalists should be displayed (on discs, the board, or on a handout) so that all groups have access to them. Each group should study the web sites and book pages listed for the three finalists, and decide which battlefield they think played the most important role in the war.

Step 3:

The entire BRAG should then meet once again to discuss new findings and decide which battlefield should be awarded the prize.

Step 4 (Individual Summaries):

Each student shall write a summary of the BRAG's findings that will be sent to the President of the United States. Include in your summary several details about how the group decided on a winner, the reasons this battlefield was chosen, and perhaps some recommendations on how the \$1,000,000 should be spent.

Possible Extension:

You might consider doing this activity with another class at your school -- or perhaps with a class from a different town. You could even arrange to do the activity with a group of students living close to one of the battle sites. If you are interested in working with a class from another school, communications can be established via e-mail (see "E-mail Other Schools" above).

Learning Advice

It is very important that all BRAG members cooperate with one another while choosing the most suitable battle site for a museum. The activity should not be viewed as a competition, but rather as a challenge for all groups to collectively select the best qualified site. Each group's input is essential so that the final selection can be made with accuracy.

Evaluation

Evaluation will be based upon:

- How effectively you cooperate with your group
- How thoroughly you research the battlefields

- How clearly you present your group's findings
 - How skillfully you write your summary/recommendation paper
-

Reflection

After the BRAG has made its recommendation to the President, each student should carefully consider the three questions listed below. Your teacher might like you to share your thoughts on these questions with the entire class.

- Which part of this activity was the most successful for you?
 - How did the BRAG agree on the winning battle site?
 - What advice would you offer to another class that is just beginning this activity?
-

Conclusion

Now that you are an "expert" on the major battlefields of the War for Independence, you can discuss your opinions with confidence. Historians have debated the topic of which battle proved most important since the war was fought over two hundred years ago. You might be interested in visiting a newsgroup (see description above) in order to participate in this discussion. Similar debates exist for the major battles of the Civil War, which took place nearly a century after the Revolutionary War. Perhaps you are interested in becoming an "expert" on that subject as well!



Notes for the Teacher

Grade Level: 5th

H/SS Content Standards:

- **5.6** Students understand the course and consequences of the American Revolution, in terms of:
 1. identifying and mapping the major military battles, campaigns and turning points of the Revolutionary War, the roles of the American and British leaders, and the Indian leaders' alliances on both sides
 2. the contributions of France and other nations and individuals to the outcome of the Revolution (e.g., Benjamin Franklin's negotiations with the French, the French navy, the Treaty of Paris, The Netherlands, Russia, Marquis de Lafayette, Kosciuszko, Baron von Steuben,)

Historical and Social Science Analysis Skills Grades K-5

Research, Evidence and Point of View

2. students pose relevant questions about events encountered in historical documents, eyewitness accounts, oral histories, letters, diaries, artifacts, photos, maps, art and architecture

Historical Interpretation

3. students identify and interpret the multiple causes and effects of historical events

Lesson Length: The lesson will require five hours or more of class time, depending in large part on the availability of computer resources. Allow for more time as well if you decide to conduct this activity in combination with another class (see "Possible Extension").

Lesson Purpose: Students will utilize internet navigation skills to access and analyze online data. They will work cooperatively in small groups and as a class to decide which battle most significantly determined the outcome of the Revolutionary War. Each student will write a summary of the process and a letter to the President of the United States recommending the chosen battle site as a location for the museum described in the introduction.

Information Literacy Skills:

- Collecting, analyzing and evaluating sources.
- Comparing data collected by other groups
- Making decisions within both small and large groups based on the data collected.
- Summarizing the overall process and making a final recommendation in the form of a written composition.

Question or Scenario: If possible, start setting the scene for this activity several days in advance. Perhaps you can kindle students' enthusiasm by telling them that you received a call from the White House that was followed by a letter from the President asking for their assistance. Posting in your classroom a blank bulletin board with a heading like "BRAG's Findings" might also arouse their interest in the project. When the day to begin the activity arrives, announce that they have been chosen by the United States government to form the Battlefield Research Analysis Group. Reading a fictitious letter from the president works well. Explain that their job is to recommend a particular battle as most important in determining the outcome of America's War for Independence. The President of the United States will award \$1,000,000 for a museum to be built at the winning site -- a museum that will serve to educate the general public on the historic battles of the Revolutionary war.

Adaptations for special needs students: Traditional sheltered English methodologies within a cooperative group setting work very effectively for this activity. Also, for groups containing special needs students, you can assign battlefields that don't have large amounts of internet resources to explore (The battle site Trenton, for example). If you choose to do this activity with another class (see "Possible Extension"), you and the other teacher might consider matching for e-mail exchanges students who share the same primary language.

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